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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the importance of time management for learning-disabled students and techniques to enhance the teaching of time management skills. Teaching effective time management calls for consideration of the student's readiness to learn new material, effective transitions between activities, clear prioritization of educational concerns from the total educational system, and opportunities for students to manage their own time. When directly teaching time management skills, teachers are advised to role model the desired behaviors, build in reward systems, barter with time, etc. (JDD)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS FOR THE CHILD OR ADOLESCENT WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Instructional time on task is believed by some to be the single most important element in improved classroom learning. Therefore time to learn and the productive use of time are both necessary factors to guarantee success in school and indeed in life in general. Therefore it is essential to help L.D. students take time seriously and not waste it. The most effective method is to role model effective time management skills yourself.

Students who chronically mismanage time provoke in others and in themselves undue stress. Selye (1974), a neurophysiologist from McGill University, says that stress is a sequence of critical events he termed General Adaption Syndrome. An event triggers an alarm, which in turn mobilizes defensive reactions or resistance, which finally consumes the system's resources if the situation goes unchecked. Stress, according to Selye, is not nervous tension but a state, a response by the body to outside stimulation. When there is too much stress, the body and the mind can be adversely affected.

The stress of students with learning disabilities is well known to any parent or educator. It is sometimes given names like hyperactivity, stubborness, laziness, etc. Such students frequently have difficulty with the organization and utilization of time. Because of fear, low self-concept, confusion or poor habits they may: procrastinate, waste time, spend more time getting ready for a task than doing the task, lack planning and/or goal setting skills, leave tasks unfinished, do only what they are comfortable or successful doing (and thereby avoid doing what is necessary or required), spend time daydreaming, acting out or in some way being off task. In general, they may be out of sync with themselves and the world about them.

Participants will learn the importance of and techniques to enhance teaching the concepts of time management to L.D. students. This is important for all students but for the L.D. student, it is critical. The student with learning disabilities seldom profits from incidental experiences. Time management is not accidently "caught," it must be "taught" directly and by "staged" example.

One very important concept both parents and teachers must take into consideration is readiness, or the time at which a student can be expected to grow, to learn new material, to achieve or integrate. Readiness is the very foundation of diagnostic prescriptive teaching. Any new learning must be data-based i.e. where is the student functioning now and how much time will be required to teach a new concept? The secret to good teaching and effective time management is to break large learning tasks into smaller components, allow sufficient time for each component to be mastered and for each student to establish and work at his/her own pace. Prioritize what is most important, and begin with first things first.

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Timing is everything (a familiar phrase). The question "when" must be frequently asked. Time is a factor in terms of when, in the hour, day, month, year, to begin new projects.

Another important concept is that of transition. Some L.D. students tend to perserverate, i.e. they get "stuck" in a rut. You may observe that it was difficult to get them started; but now that it is time to move on, you can't get them to stop. A short transition time between tasks, assignments, classes, etc. will smooth the way. Several cues along the way help tremendously. Specific procedures for beginning and ending class are helpful. Make verbal statements about not only what is expected, but how much time is given. Give 5 and 10 minute cues before bell time or before another activity is to begin. It may be important to prod an individual who is dawdling, but some children simply cannot function under pressure.

David Elkind (1981) speaks of the "hurried child." He suggests that adults frequently give children mixed messages particularly regarding maturation time. The developmental tasks of moving from childhood through adolescence into adulthood or "growing up" is fraught with conflicts. Each child must master a variety of new roles, familial, social, and finally vocational before arriving at adulthood. Parents and teachers, on one hand, are saying grow up, hurry up, be an adult. On the other hand, many youngsters feel betrayed because the very actions they consider adult, i.e. choosing their own friends, time schedules, and activities such as driving, smoking, drinking, and sex are taboo or withheld from them with the admonition "you are not old enough." It is a tight rope for parents and teachers alike. A secondary problem for some L.D. children and adolescents is emotional lability (McCarthy & McCarthy, 1971). The storms of sudden emotional outbursts may be indicative of uncontrolled emotions too near the surface, and not quite within control. When they do not get their own way, their low tolerance or frustration may cause them to rebel and/or give up altogether.

Teachers would be empowered to do a better job of prioritizing (what to teach to whom, when) if parents and educational leaders would provide some clear directives. American schools have been under fire with extreme criticism from every direction. A barrage of reports have led to controversy over not only what is wrong with education, but how to affect school reform. Probably not since Sputnik in 1957 has the entire nation so completely focused on the school and its mission. The educational literature and rhetoric today sounds much the same as it did then. There was also the period of the sixties and seventies in which the pendulum swung in the opposite direction. Today the schools are accused of failing society; then the schools were accused of failing the individual. The attention given the problems of the schools can be viewed not only as a signal for reform but also as a need for support to garner the necessary resources to carry out the reform. Much of the criticism is fragmented, myopic, unfair, and unjustifiably negative. A passage from A Nation at Risk (1983) was self-explanatory: "If an unfriendly foreign power attempted to impose on America the mediocre education performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it

as an act of war."

Many critics have compared the achievement scores of our youngsters to that of Japan and other countries without taking into account the diverse society in America in which all are educated. Most other countries educate only their elite. The pressure for academic achievement has never been greater. Achievement and aptitude tests alone cannot measure the achievement of American education. Our schools are organizations with many purposes which tests don't even attempt to measure. Tests do not measure motivation, abilities that lie dormant, nor the underlying stressors of students, teachers and/or administrators. The pressure to meet individual needs frequently creates demands of the exact opposite nature. The Education for the Handicapped Act, P.L. 94-142, guaranteed the right to a free appropriate education to the handicapped, the last minority to be granted their rights. While a very positive and necessary action, the implementation of that law increased the burden on schools to meet yet another need. The more a child differs from the norm, the more resources and creativity are needed to serve that child. There is no doubt that schools are very stressful places for many youngsters; and that, in fact, many fail school or school fails them. There are, I'm sure, teachers and administrators who have sadistic tendencies, those who don't care about children or teaching; and those who fear or even hate students for their exuberance, or their youth, their ethnic or socio-economic status. But I'm equally sure they are in the minority and that the majority of educators are caring, decent, intelligent people trying to do an enormous job. Teachers need some clear messages about priorities themselves.

Once we empower the teacher we can get on with the task of empowering students. One way to empower or enable the L.D. child or adolescent to more effectively manage time is to grant "ownership" of time as much as possible. Most often very little time is actually "owned" or self-imposed. If students are to manage time well, they must be given the opportunity to do so. Think about how infrequently students "own" time.

(1) Parental imposed time: The parent must impose rules and regulations about "when" or time management in the home. However, it is the perfect mechanism for teaching the child to honor his or her own time as well as that of others. Giving them as much ownership as possible about such clock-driven activities as rising in the morning, going to bed at night, meal time, arriving home after school, study time, preparation for school, work or home responsibilities will assist in setting proper attitude toward time. As soon as children are old enough to understand being "on time" they should be given their own alarm clock and be encouraged to self-monitor. It is symbolic as well as instructive. Parents should step back and monitor only when absolutely necessary.

(2) School system imposed time: The school calendar per se offers little freedom of choice. Beginning and ending dates, vacation schedules, and the daily starting and dismissal times are

all given. It is necessary to teach the L.D. student the importance of honoring system parameters. These are the most easily measured and monitored. Absenteeism and tardiness are gross measures of a students time-on-task. Such records may be viewed now and years later to determine reliability and/or dependability. Many proponents of the time-on-task principle would like to see the school day and the school year extended; others believe that more time in and of itself will have little value. Nevertheless, the manner in which a student recognizes and responds to system imposed parameters is critical and likely to win him or her favor if honored. Reward systems for punctuality and good attendance records are helpful in getting some students on the right track.

(3) Teacher imposed time: Classroom starting and ending time, activity driven time, tests, discussions, experiments, field trips, etc. are all times in which the teacher determines the time signals. Effective use of classroom time demands that the teacher role-model that which they wish students to demonstrate. Not only must the teacher understand and utilize the principles of student readiness, but the teacher preparation and readiness must be evident. The lesson plans, classroom materials and equipment necessary for the session must be in place and ready for use before the students arrive. By being prepared themselves during class and before the bell rings, teachers give a powerful message to students. L.D. students may need additional verbal mediation. It may be necessary to direct the L.D. student's attention to the importance of having paper, plenty of sharpened pencils, pens (i.e. the "tools" of learning) and to such time-saving tasks as listening carefully to assignments, taking notes and organizing assignments. Again, teacher attention to the desired behavior when you "catch them being good," will reinforce the desired behavior. The student will then be more likely begin to follow the leader and in doing so will begin to feel more in control.

Individual instruction of the child or adolescent with learning disabilities necessitates understanding how much time to allow a given student to perform successfully. A great deal of latitude may be needed for feedback, testing and evaluation of achievement and for recycling back through the diagnostic prescriptive process. Allowing "think" time when asking students to respond to questions indicates a willingness to wait, to tolerate silence, rather than set up an expectation of an immediate response. Many L.D. students are quite articulate in a comfortable situation but do poorly when rushed or caught unaware.

Some ways the teacher can role model the desired behaviors are:

(1) set daily, weekly, monthly, and grade period goals for themselves as instructor and share them with the class;
(2) check off accomplishments on a "to do" list, with fanfare in front of the class;
(3) evaluate time delays, interruptions and missed deadlines with the class;
(4) attempt to always start class on time and end with sufficient time for a smooth transition to the next class

or activity;

(5) always take time to give adequate directions, explanations of expected behavior and classroom procedures;
(6) include practice time before expecting students to demonstrate achievement;
(7) check regularly to make sure that all students understand directions and class assignments (rather than asking "do you understand" ask a student to stand and repeat the directions);
(8) when lessons are completed, take time to draw conclusions and re-identify learning objectives;
(9) when assigning homework, take time to "connect" it to previously learned material;
(10) be aware of the time it takes to carry out class assignments and homework, and allow proper time. (Try doing your own assignments without the key, periodically);
(11) when making long range assignments, use frequent calendar reminders. (When possible, use an outline and suggest interim deadlines for each phase of a major assignment.)

When directly teaching time management skills, begin by stating the objectives to the class. Lead each student to make a personal commitment to use time more effectively. Develop a brief questionnaire to enable them to analyze their own time drains. Give each of them a "carry" calendar (you can usually get them free from advertisers around holiday time). They will love marking out vacation time and special events on their very own calendar. When teaching a self-contained class, begin each day with calendar activities. When making assignments have students mark deadlines on their calendars. With younger, less able students, talk about such things as time to work and time to play. Help them make friends with the clock. Coordinate time instruction with the home. Reinforce parents who have given their child their own alarm clock and who are doing their part to allow ownership for personal time at home. Work together to use both the calendar and the clock at every opportunity to drive home the concept of effective time management.

Build in reward systems whenever possible. Stickers and stars still work for most kids, even older ones if the subject of the sticker is age appropriate. Monthly checks of "calendar keepers" is a good place for such a strategy.

Barter with time; for work turned in promptly, punctuality, improved time-on-task, etc. give extra minutes of recess, early dismissal or in-class free time, if permitted include some time centered fun activities in the building or classroom. Parents and teachers alike give away much that could be used for bartering. Develop a list of time bartering items and share it with parents. Ask them to generate a similar home list.

Provide time for play, pleasure and personal growth for you and them.

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